

**TOWN OF HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
COMMENTS FROM PUBLIC HEARING
September 22, 2020**

A Public Hearing was held by the Charter Revision Commission on Tuesday, September 22, 2020 via Zoom due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M. by Frank Dixon, Chairman.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Frank Dixon, Chair; Jackie Downing, Vice-Chair; Lamond Battle, Secretary; Tiffany Artis-Wilson; Todd Berton; Jeff Cohen; Tom Figlar; Sarah Gallagher; Marnie Hebron; Myron Hul; Jay Kaye; Todd Moler; Nancy Olson; Frank LaDore; Joshua Sprague-Oliveira

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Steve Mednick, Counsel

Attached are comments that were emailed in and brief notes from those who spoke at the hearing.

There being no further business Mr. Dixon requested a motion to adjourn. Moved by Ms. Olson, seconded by Mr. LaDore and adjourned at 8:14pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Renta
Clerk of the Council

*Public Hearing notes taken and submitted by Jackie Downing, Vice-Chair

PUBLIC HEARING COMMENTS

CHARTER REVISION

9-22-2020

Mon 9/21/2020 1:03 PM

Good morning,

I am writing to you today regarding the QU student housing.

The focus should not be on the students living in these houses, it should be on the landlords that own these houses and who have absolutely no respect or consideration for the neighborhood in which these houses are in.

Because there are no consequences for their action or lack of action, this problem will continue and it will grow as seen by the increase of housing permits requested every year. They should be held accountable for their actions. I suggest that the charter should include a 3 strike policy, meaning that if there are three legitimate complaints, their permit for student housing should be revoked for year.

This is a serious issue that needs to be addressed and not ignored any longer.

Regards,

Wendy Santamauro

Mon 9/21/2020 5:04 PM

Dear Members of the Hamden Charter Revision Committee:

You have important work in front of you. Review of the town charter offers the opportunity to put in place governance that we can believe in and perhaps prevent us from getting in the trouble that we currently find ourselves in.

Our charter is outdated and has not served to guide us well. We currently have out of control finances fueled by borrowed monies; concerns over a police culture that focuses on aggression rather than safety; school ranking and housing values that continue to slip; and frustration over what feels to be undemocratic decision making. I wish for town management that is up to date, committed to transparency and representation of all parts of our town, focused on results and execution, caring, nimble, innovative and visionary.

I ask that you take a look at charters of other townships of similar size and particularly [charter revisions for West Haven](#) (currently under MARB oversight) which has drive a change from a mayoral to a town manager form of governance <https://www.cityofwesthaven.com/DocumentCenter/View/1987/Charter-Revision-Proposed-Language-Changes-PowerPoint-PDF>

I have the following concerns that I ask you to specifically address:

- I would like to see Hamden move to professional rather than political leadership- that is, a town manager form of government with a focus on expertise in finance, administration, budget making and contract management as required skills.
- Public employees should not be able to serve on the LC nor should relatives of employees. This poses a conflict of interest- pitting personal interest above public interest and creating a culture of distrust by residents. Citizens must be able to trust their elected officials. Employees currently serve at the will of the Mayor and risk their jobs if they disagree.
- Contract bidding requirements, vetting and letting that adhere to standard rules to ensure quality of deliverables and efficiency. Contracts should be reviewed regularly for effectiveness and competitiveness.
- The Ethic Board should provide oversight and proactive insight not just respond to requests from LC members for opinions. The Board is in the position of guiding the ethical character of Hamden township.
- Agenda items for Legislative Council meetings should be posted a week ahead of time or automatically tabled to give the public and Council members to time to consider the issues. Enforcement of this should be strict.
- The Legislative Council should be charged with closely monitoring the work of each department with regular assessment.

Thank you,

Judy G Clark

Ridge Road

Mon 9/21/2020 9:36 PM

Dear Commission Members:

Thank you so much for volunteering to serve on this important commission. I know you will have a lot of work to do in the coming months. I have several concerns that I'd like your commission to address in making changes to the Charter. I will list them.

- Our town is in a terribly financially precarious position. We need to change what we are doing as it is not working in favor of the residents. We need a professional person in charge of the "business" of Hamden. Currently, we have been operating as if we are a mom and pop business with very little to no professional expertise at the mayoral/administrative level. It has been very difficult politically to change from a Mayoral form of government because of political influence. This is unfortunate as most politicians running for local government do not have the expertise to run a multi million dollar government. If we fall under MARB control, we may not have a choice (see West Haven and their charter revision). Could we change the Charter to allow for the possibility of having a Town or City Manager?
- Commissions should be made up of people who have some experience in the area they are serving. The Legislative Council should be responsible for overseeing that such nominated persons are appropriate for the job they are being asked to do.
- We must change the rules to **disallow** Town employees, retirees or relatives of retirees or employees from serving on the Legislative Council, commissions and in the Mayoral Administrative offices. We must address all conflicts of interest. We need to make and enforce penalties for failing to meet such guidelines.
- We must change the IT infrastructure to allow a more robust system in the Town government and in the BOE. Last year we had 3 months of no internet in the public schools (prior to the Pandemic closing) and the Town government email server regularly spits back emails as undeliverable. This is unacceptable because it limits the public's ability to contact the members of their town government.
- Hamden resident participation in public commissions has risen dramatically with the commission meetings broadcast via Zoom. It is important that we allow Zoom (or Zoom like) access to all public meetings after the Pandemic is over.

- The public should be allowed to speak at all public meetings via accessible, non-in person means. The public should have access to all public meetings via a recording which would be posted no later than 5 days after the meeting was held. All minutes, agendas and back-up materials need to be posted consistently and in a timely manner in accordance with FOI requirements.
- Commissions should be required to meet regularly at least 10 months out of the year. For some reason, the Police Commission did not meet for several months this year (while other commissions met regularly). This severely limits the public's access to the commission and to raising issues of public concern.
- No-bid contracts should be severely limited in order to deter abuse. Currently they are seen as a last minute need by the Administration, but the process is frequently abused. Establish rules when a no-bid contract can be used and establish consequences if it is abused.
- Allow for recall of a mayor, BOE members and legislative council members. Presently, we have few options to allow for a recall of an elected official unless a crime has been committed. Dereliction of duty, misuse of power, failure to work or show up for work and other means of abuse of the public trust are not grounds for a recall election. We need to add this flexibility to our Charter.

Thank you for taking the time to read my ideas regarding the changes that you should consider when revising the Hamden Charter.

Sincerely,

Elaine M Dove

Santa Fe Ave.

Mon 9/21/2020 11:19 PM

Hi

I have many concerns regarding student rentals in our residential neighborhoods. Instead of just approving the houses as college rentals these homes should be inspected for the initial application approval and every year after. I believe half of these houses are not legal and are not up to code especially if you are packing these houses with more than the agreed amount of four per house. This is a fire hazard having more than the agreed upon amount of students is a very dangerous situation especially if there in basements. Have you driven down new rd QU follows the guidelines per house no cars parked all over the lawns or all over the streets. I honestly would not have my kids staying in half of these homes -blight properties. I take a lot of pride in my home my house taxes and car taxes are outrageous. Do you really think this is fair to us the permanent residents..Your not helping us your pacifying these slum student housing landlords that only care about how many student rental pmts they can get per house... These rental properties are like commercial properties throughout residential neighborhoods. These rental homeowners are Getting away with not paying car taxes just house taxes in all fairness they should have a different tax like they do in some of these shore properties Luxury tax/- this would balance out the town of Hamden for the amount of cars driving on our roads and helping your Hamden residents. If Quinnipiac University would only make there upper class man housing more affordable less than half of what there paying these slum landlords would go belly up... I blame the town 100% for allowing this to happen in residential neighborhoods and not caring at All just worried about losing in court every time to the landlords. Let all the residents know when your next court date is so we can come there and see what really goes on.. You can hire me to go around To these houses and inspect and I won't be afraid to stamp disapproved. I really hope the town of Hamden realizes there hurting the residents who really care.The town of Hamden allowed QU to have the upper hand—QU forgets were they started the original school was off Whitney near lake Whitney....The amount of families moving out of town is sad and the enrollment I'm sure is down. Plus on top of this you have affordable housing that would be a better option for the students so there in one place if the want to be off campus. The mayor could care less about his residents of Hamden who he should be protecting and looking out for instead he's worried about suing the town and raising the taxes...

claudio scirocco

Tue 9/22/2020 9:28 AM

Good day,

It is my understanding that fees for permits for Quinnipiac Private Rental homes is at a minimal rate. Given the amount of vehicles in our neighborhoods and additional garbage produced and the overage of allowed students in a household is exceeded, I would like to see some restrictions and or fines placed on these homes. While I have two such homes on my street the noise levels so far have been fine. The car parking and garbage are not.

I would like to suggest that the current fee of \$300 to apply for the permit is just too low and the renewal of \$150 is ridiculous. I would like to see the following instituted and followed.

1. Fee changes to a substantial amount to let owner know they must have renters comply with all terms. Perhaps a \$2000. Initial fee
2. Yearly renewal should be at minimum \$500 (with rental fees at \$900 or more per student per month and having more than 4 students this is reasonable)
3. Owners name and contact as well as each student in household with contact info be provided to neighbors each year as students change.
4. If continuous calls to police department for issues has affected neighborhood a fine be implied to owner. If more than three per year owner loses permit.
5. No automatic permit remains with the home if ownership changes hands.
6. No parking on front lawns and home must remain presentable with landscape and no buildup of garbage visible to street.
7. Lastly, and most importantly there should be a limit as how many homes in a particular area can be zoned for student housing as our area is being overrun with student housing. If Quinnipiac can't house the students then perhaps they should cut enrollment.

I am certain those in other neighborhoods can add to this list but it must be taken care of and in writing so we have something to go to. The town has been negligent in setting this up from the start.

Thank you for your considerations.

Cheryl Kasprzycki

Paradise Ave

Tue 9/22/2020 3:55 PM

Dear Charter Review Committee,

Thank you for undertaking this important task of reviewing and revising Hamden's Charter

I have a number of recommendations, but none is more important than the subject of our form of government. We currently have a Mayoral form of government which relies on the political process to elect leadership. It is critical that Hamden move to a more professional form of government with the transition to a City Manager hired by the Legislative Council.

Why is this so important?

Under Mayoral leadership over the years, the Town has moved slowly but surely to huge indebtedness (\$1.1 Billion or \$18,000 per resident). Our regular deficit budgets has led to the borrowing that has created this huge indebtedness which in turn has led to regular downgrading of our bond status to one step above "Junk bond" with a negative outlook. Poor, incompetent or willful mismanagement of the budget seems to have been accepted for years.

That is all about to end with some combination of inability to borrow more money, reduced bond status to junk and continued runaway budget deficits.

A City Manager's prime role is budget management and the Legislative Council can require this or fire the City Manager. They can't fire the Mayor. They can't even discipline the Mayor. For those of you who have watched over the last several years, the presentations to the LC by the Mayor and his staff, you will have heard how desperate Hamden is to borrow more money. The explanation is that we have to borrow or we will not have cash to pay our bills. And, the motions are always last minute and promise dire consequences if the LC doesn't pass this bond issue or that immediately. ..one heck of a way to "run a railroad."

Hamden is headed into very serious and difficult financial times. For the next 15-20 years, Hamden will have to start paying back the money that has been borrowed and the pension payments that have been delayed. **This will mean severe austerity measures will have to be evaluated and implemented.** Some say it is inevitable that the State's financial oversight body , MARB, will be coming in to require more responsible budgeting including a 3-5 yr. financial plan that shows a balanced budget. The difference between that scenario and the past years which supposedly showed passage of a balanced budget is that MARB will not tolerate budgets with padded revenues and understated expenses which have characterized recent years' budgets.

A City Manager by training and experience, will have had experience in all areas of municipal administration including fiscal management, budget oversight, personnel administration and labor negotiations. We need that level of expertise to manage the difficult times ahead. We need someone who can take charge of our finances and still maintain the quality of services which we all want. The Mayoral form of government has shown how not to manage town finances. Hamden has reached its "credit card" limits and requires serious financial leadership.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stocky Clark

Tue 9/22/2020 4:56 PM

Dear Commission Members

I recommend the following;

Section 3-3 E. Election of At-Large Members

E. Electors shall vote for no more than four (4) At-Large candidates. Replace 4 with 6

F. Keep same wording. 4 year term for BOE.

Section 3-5 Vacancies in elected offices

B Legislative Council and Town Clerk. A vacancy shall be filled by a majority vote of the Town Committee for a person of the same political party or affiliation as that of the person who just vacated the office.

C. The Board of Education. A vacancy shall be filled by a majority vote of the Town Committee for a person of the same political party or affiliation as that of the person who just vacated the office.

Section 3-9 Conflict of Interest and Ethics. Add: All persons employed by the town, BOE or have a contract with the town and persons in the household shall not be an elected official of the town.

Chapter 5 The Mayor

I believe that we should not create a Town Manager position. We should not allow our frustration with our present situation to push us to make changes to our Charter that will alter the character of our town. I like being able to directly vote for our Mayor every two years and there is no evidence that Town Manager governments are more efficient.

Sincerely
Sean Grace
Hamden Resident

Public Input to Charter Revision Commission
As of 9-22-20

Stocky Clark – in-persona and in writing
Transition to Town Manager
Prohibit Town employees from serving on Council

Diane Hoffman – in-person
Ensure public input, oral and written, in all matters

Justin Farmer – in-person
Create Civilian Review Board
Mandate regular meetings of commissions
All voters to vote for six at-large candidates instead of four

Judy Clark – in-person and in writing
Transition to Town Manager
Prohibit Town employees and their relatives from serving on Council
Require documents that will be reviewed by the Council to be submitted one week in advance
to allow for more time to review before meetings
Tighten contract bidding requirements and contract oversight
Allow Ethics Board to be proactive and not just respond to Council inquiries
Charge the Council with monitoring each Town department

Cheryl Kasprzycki – in-person and in writing
Regulate density of QU rental houses
Charge higher fees and renewals to rental housing landlords
Provide landlord name and contact info to neighbors
Give more power to noise, blight and public nuisance ordinances
Revoke permits from repeat offenders
Prohibit auto-renewal of rental permit when houses are sold

Rhonda Caldwell – in-person
Create Civilian Review Board with subpoena powers as first line of discipline

Wendy Santamauro – in writing
Revoke rental permit for one year from landlords who have three legitimate complaints filed
against a given rental property

Elaine Dove – in writing
Transition to Town Manager
Council should ensure that appointees to commissions have experience in the area they serve
Prohibit Town employees, retirees and their relatives from serving on Council and in the Mayor's
Office
Place penalties on conflict of interest violations
Ensure robust IT system in Town government and BOE
Ensure Zoom access to all public commissions

Public meetings all have virtual, oral public comment which is recorded and posted
Meeting minutes, agendas and back up materials are posted in a timely manner
Mandate regular meetings of commissions (at least 10 month each year)
Limit no bid contracts
Allow for recall of elected officials

Claudio Scirocco – in writing

Inspect student rental housing before approval and annually
Place higher tax rate on multi-unit rental properties

Sean Grace – in writing

All voters to vote for six at-large candidates instead of four
Make BOE four year term
Fill vacancies of Town Clerk, Council, BOE by majority of vote of appropriate Town Committee
Prohibit Town, BOE employees and contractors from serving in elected office
No Town Manager